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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8949  
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 6615  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 2427  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5382  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
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RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 5522  
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SUBJECT: EMBASSY PLANS TO OBSERVE BHUTAN'S FIRST ELECTION

¶1. (U) Summary: Marking the transition from absolute monarchy to democracy, the Kingdom of Bhutan will hold its first national elections in December 2007 and March 2008. Though the USG has no formal diplomatic relations with the Bhutanese government, the Bhutanese have welcomed Embassy observers during these elections and Embassy New Delhi plans to send two officers. End Summary.

Bhutan's Road to Democracy  
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¶2. (U) In late 2005, Bhutanese King Jigme Singye Wangchuck announced that Bhutan would hold its first national elections in 2008 and transition to a parliamentary democracy. This follows over a century of rule by absolute monarchs, often under the suzerainty of a third party such as Britain or India. Incremental steps towards national elections were taken over the past decade, beginning with nonparty elections for parliament and transfer of day-to-day administration to the cabinet.

¶3. (U) In preparation for the establishment of democracy, Bhutan has gradually paved the way for devolution of political power to democratic institutions. An April 2007 royal edict lifted a decades-old ban on political parties. The Bhutanese government has worked closely with the Election Commission of India to ensure free and fair elections. As part of the preparations, the Bhutan government has held a number of mock-elections to acclimate the Bhutanese people to the ballot box.

¶4. (U) On October 23, the Bhutanese Election Commission officially announced December 26 as election day for the upper house. Chief Election Commissioner Kunzang Wangdi outlined the campaign schedule with a nomination deadline of November 27 and election day of December 26. Results will be announced on December 27. Candidates will be allowed to campaign from November 30 - December 24. While final dates have yet to be officially announced, lower-house elections are expected in March 2008.

Election Observers  
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15. (U) While the Bhutanese Election Commission stipulates that only nations with official diplomatic ties to Bhutan can send formal election observers, given the warm U.S.- Bhutan relationship, the Bhutanese Embassy in New Delhi welcomed a small official American presence during the election. Embassy New Delhi plans to send two officers to Bhutan in December and again in March to observe the elections as Bhutan makes the welcome and challenging transition to democracy.  
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